

Back in the saddle

By FRANCINE LOCKE BRAY

It has been over a year since an update on the Choctaw horses has been provided. A lot has been happening and they are beginning to make their mark on the worldwide equine community.

Probably the most exciting event of 2012 was the winning of the U.S. National Cavalry Competition by John Brownrigg of North Avondale, Colo., and his Spanish Mustang, Socks. Each year, the U.S. Cavalry Association holds its National Cavalry Competition at a historic cavalry fort and, on occasion, at an active duty post. In September of 2012, the competition was held at Fort Riley, Kan., home of the Cavalry School for Officers of the Horse Mounted Cavalry. The post is also the home of the U.S. Cavalry Association Headquarters. John and Socks won the Level III Field Jumping and placed high in all the other events and the Directors' Cup. They were subsequently named 2012 Champion of the Competition. This coming September, John will be defending his title at the Norris-Penrose event center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Socks came out of the foundation herds owned by Bryant Rickman of Soper.

Mary Carter McConnell of Rapidan, Va., reported that the horses at Summer Duck Wood in Virginia also did well in 2012. At Herndon, Va., Cotton Belt and Mystic Shadow, both Choctaw horses, showed in jumper classes. Cotton Belt, a 4-year-old, won three adult hunter hopeful classes and was the division champion.

Three more of the Summer Duck Wood Choctaw horses –Summer, Calumet, and Romulus – went to a hunter pace and won the blue ribbon. Quest, yet another Choctaw horse, won first place at the Waredaca three-day events. Mystic Shadow won a lead line class. In June, Ricochet's Promise came in third in her first competitive driving competition at the Upperville, Va., horse show. This show is the longest running (130 years) horse show in the country. All of these magnificent equines came from the foundation herds owned by Bryant Rickman. Mary is hopeful they will have a Choctaw horse ready for the 2016 Olympics! She says, "Once these horses have a job to do they love doing it."

Once again the Choctaw ponies were a presence at the 2012 Choctaw Labor Day Festival. Ten of Mr. Rickman's horses spent several days in a Choctaw Nation pasture near Lake Nanih Waiya. Viewing of the horses was added to the buffalo tours conducted during the festival. In addition, several horses were again in the Choctaw Village. Over 350 rides were given on Saturday and Sunday. In April 2013 Brad and Jennie Smith and Michael and Francine Bray, along with the Smiths' Choctaw horse, Chief Blue Streak, spent the day at the Wellston Elementary School. The school was holding its annual Oklahoma heritage and cultural awareness day and had invited the group to come teach the children about the Choctaw horse. Over

350 children attended the half-hour sessions which covered a brief history of the horses and information on conformation and how these horses are different from other equines. The children really liked learning the Choctaw word for horse, isuba, and that Blue could run from Wellston to Oklahoma City and back three times in one day without tiring! Blue, by the way, seemed to really enjoy all the attention he received from the many hands eager to pet a Choctaw horse.

Yvette and Sean Collin of Florence, Ala., recently opened a sanctuary for tours to those interested in learning more about the Native American horse and native culture and tradition. Sacred Way Sanctuary is home to roughly 40 Choctaw horses, as well as roughly 60 other Native American horses from around the country. Yvette Collin has also started her PhD at the University of Alaska Fairbanks on "Native Americans and their traditional relationship with their horse." Each of the horses at their sanctuary will be part of this PhD research project, which is focused on supporting Native American oral history that claims that the indigenous horse of the Americas survived the Ice Age and intermixed with the wild horse of Europe that was brought over by the conquistadors in the late 1400s and early 1500s.

This last May, one of the featured activities at the Choctaw Culture Camp in Tvshka Homma was instructions on how to draw a Choctaw horse. Ruby Bolding taught several classes on the Choctaw horses' conformation. They learned that a Choctaw horse varies in size from 13.2 to 14.2 hands high. They have broad heads and narrow faces; small, hooked ears are typical. Their strength and durability come from deep but narrow chests. The croup is sloped and their tail is set on low. Thus the beautiful long tails that are often more than one color. The model used was Icky, a Choctaw horse owned by Dr. Phil Sponenberg of Blacksburg, Va.

In addition to the above exciting events, this past year the Antlers Public Library completed an expansion project. Patti Lehman, the head librarian, had decided to use the subject of the Choctaw Culture as the exhibits in the children's section. A storyboard was completed for one of three walls. In addition to the storyboard, an informational binder was given to the older children and adults to use as a reference. When in Antlers, be sure to stop by to see the storyboard and check out the additional information and pictures available.

You can also now see a storyboard and pictures of the Choctaw horses in the Choctaw Casino Too, just south of Durant. A brief history of the horses is on one wall with pictures of some favorite Choctaw horses, including Chief Going Streak, on the adjoining wall. Take a moment to stop by and learn about this important icon of Choctaw culture.

Most recently, The DreamVision Company of Fort Worth, Texas, visited Southeastern Oklahoma to begin filming a documentary named "The One Horse Movie." Joseph LaMere, producer, brought his video team to interview Bryant Rickman about the history and current status of the Choctaw horse. They spent three days interviewing and filming and plan to make at least two more visits. While

this documentary is intended to feature a number of sites throughout the United States, the Choctaw horses once again "stole the show." Joe was so impressed with Rickman and his horses that he is considering a documentary devoted solely to them.

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